

Who was Jesus? – Answers from the Gospel of John

Jesus – United in Him (John 17:1-26)

8-30-09

Let me ask you some questions in fairly rapid succession. I not only want you to think about how you would answer them, but also to pay attention to the emotions that they stir up in you.

- Does God choose us or do we choose God?
- Is it possible to lose your salvation?
- Do the more miraculous spiritual gifts described in the Bible such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing, still exist today, or have they ceased?
- Should women be allowed to teach and lead men within the church or should they not?
- Should a church sing more modern, contemporary, Christian songs on Sunday mornings or old, traditional, hymns?
- Should a person dress up for church on Sunday mornings or should they come as they are?
- Is having traditional church programs such as Sunday School, Sunday Evening Services, and Wednesday Night Youth Group the best way to fulfill the Great Commission or is there another way?
- Should a church own a building or should it rent?
- What is better for your kids, home schooling, Christian schooling, or public schooling?
- Is spanking ok?
- Is it more valuable to involve your kids in secular or church sponsored after school activities?
- Is it better to have both parents working or to have one stay at home?
- Should a guy be working 50 plus hours a week at his career?
- Does being a Christian mean you should always vote straight Republican?
- To what degree should we get on board with the “Green Movement”?
- Where is the line for modesty for women? Meaning, how short is too short, how tight is too tight, and how low is too low?

For how many of you did these questions illicit STRONG feelings and opinions, or perhaps even negative thoughts or feelings toward those who might answer differently than you? These questions, and thousands of others like them, have potential to cause major disagreement and disunity amongst fellow believers in Jesus Christ. In fact, these sorts of questions have caused the breakdown and division of Christian relationships, churches, and even denominations throughout the ages. Disagreement, disunity, and division within the church not only grieves God and hurts those involved, but it tarnishes the witness of the church in the eyes of those who have not yet come to believe. One of the biggest excuses people make for not looking more seriously into the Christian faith is the lack of unity within the church. They look out at all the different denominations, all the divisions within denominations, and all the disagreements and splits within local churches all around them, and they figure something just isn't right. They rightly ask themselves, "If the Bible is indeed God's holy, righteous, and infallible Word and can be rightly interpreted and understood by men, then why is it that no one can agree on what it means and how that meaning applies to our lives?" Unfortunately, many unbelievers jump quickly to the wrong conclusion to this very good and logical question. They conclude that the problem must lie with the Bible instead of with those who are interpreting it, and therefore they never look seriously into the Bible for themselves, nor do they take anyone seriously who has.

But the problem lies not with the Bible, which is indeed infallible and can indeed be rightly interpreted and applied by men, but with those who are interpreting it. The problem with the interpreters is two-fold. First, many people who claim to be Christians and spend time interpreting the Bible and even teaching others to do the same, are not really Christians at all. Though they claim to be in Christ, the fruit of their lives, including their beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Bible, simply do not line up. Because they are not truly saved, and have not been born again, they do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them who Jesus sent to help us to interpret His Word correctly. Without the Holy Spirit to guide them into and reveal God's truth, they bend and twist God's Word to say whatever their hearts desire. There are these sorts of often well meaning, yet unredeemed and unenlightened interpreters, causing disunity and division within every church, even the most pure. The Apostle Paul speaks of them and those who listen to them this way in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the

time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

The second problem with the interpreters is this. Even those interpreters who HAVE BEEN born again and HAVE BEEN given the Holy Spirit to help them to interpret God’s Word correctly, are still capable of misinterpreting it. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Not until we get to heaven will we see and know God and the things of God clearly. Until that time, we must, with GREAT HUMILITY, do our best, with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to figure out the meaning of the Scriptures and how they apply to our lives. We must be VERY RESPECTFUL of other born again believers who come to different, Biblically supportable conclusions than we do, and we must be VERY CAREFUL in choosing what hills we are willing to die on. Many born again believers, because of their remaining spiritual blindness and pride, fight to the death with other believers over grey area, or minor doctrinal issues, that should never have been argued about at all. They blindly fall into the same trap some of the Ephesians believer fell into 2,000 years ago. Paul prepares Timothy to address them with these words in 1 Timothy 6:4-5, “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth.” As we’ve already stated, these completely unnecessary, stubborn, selfish, prideful quarrels over nothing, grieve God, hurt other believers, and kill our witness to the unbelieving world.

Needless to say, God’s design for His church was NOT that it would be full of disagreement, disunity, and division. In fact, His design was that it would be exactly the opposite. God’s design for His church was that it would be so united, so much on the same page in terms of belief, love, and purpose, that it

would reflect the perfect unity of God the Father and His Son Jesus to an unbelieving world, and draw them unto Himself. Jesus prays that this would happen at the end of His Prayer in John 17.

John 17:20-23 (NIV)

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

We see an immediate answer to Jesus' prayer in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:1-12 (NIV) - A very diverse crowd hears the Gospel

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ *Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*

⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"

⁸ *Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?*

⁹ *Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,*

¹⁰ *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome*

¹¹ *(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"*

¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Acts 2:37-47 (NIV) – Christian unity despite diversity and its results

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

⁴¹ *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

⁴⁴ *All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

⁴⁶ *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,*

⁴⁷ *praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Other examples of the beauty and power of unity in Christ...

- Bill Olson (what a difference being born again makes)
- Belize (immediate unity across culture)
- Brett (from nothing to everything in common especially with Amos)
- Memorial Park Picnic (united in mission)

How can we be a church like this!!!! How can we be so united in Christ, that despite a million differences, we are one even as the Father and the Son are one?

1) Pray that God would make us as pure a church as possible.

- a. In other words that He would bring revival to our church as He did on the day of Pentecost since the God-honoring, soul winning unity that Jesus prays for in John 17 is only possible amongst true, born again believers.

2) When we disagree with a brother or sister in Christ to the degree that it gets our dander up and begins to threaten our unity we need to...

- a. check our motives.
 - i. Why is it that this bothers me so much? Is it because it is really important to God or because it is really important to me? Why do I want to argue with my brother over this issue? Is it because I am concerned for God's glory and his good, or is it because I want to be right?

- b. ask ourselves whether this is a hill we should die on.
 - i. Some issues are worth dividing over, e.g. the Gospel, the nature of God, and the reliability of the Bible.
 - ii. Most issues are not. Don't divide over minor doctrinal or grey area issues.
 - iii. It is possible to stay united despite fairly major doctrinal disagreements e.g. egalitarians, Armenians, and dispensationalists at MOB

- c. think about the damage that disagreement, disunity, and division causes.
 - i. To God, the church, and the unbelieving world

- d. focus on the ENORMOUS, ETERNAL things we have in common rather than the tiny, temporal things that we may differ on.
 - i. Go through John 17 and point them all out. What an incredible abundance we have in Christ!

Let's go back to questions I asked you in the beginning. All these have potential to divide us at The Water's Edge. Let's not let them!